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ABSTRACT

This study of 98 special education teachers investigated the reasons for the high attrition of special education teachers in Kentucky. The participants were asked to give three reasons (in no more than one phrase) why in their opinion special education teachers leave special education and choose to teach general education. The most common reason identified for special education teacher attrition is the excessive paper work. It was identified as a reason by 80 percent of the respondents and it was the first reason listed. The second most common reason identified is the lack of respect, support, cooperation, acceptance, and understanding by the general education teachers. The third most popular reason given for special education teacher attrition is the lack of principals' respect, support, and cooperation. Lack of student progress, work overload, and lack of parent interest were also given as reasons for special education teacher attrition. Recommendations are provided for addressing the concerns of special education teachers. The survey instrument is attached as well as data on all the reasons mentioned by respondent. (CR)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS' ATTRITION IN KENTUCKY AND ITS REASONS

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The shortage of special education teachers has been and continues to be a national problem. States have tried different ways to address this problem. Generally they issue some kind of emergency certificates. In Kentucky individuals who have a teaching certificate of any type or in any area and who have completed at least nine hours of course work in special education are issued a one year provisional certificate in special education. This certificate is renewable annually for a maximum of three years provided that the certificate holder continues to take at least six hours of special education course work annually. It is expected that they complete the course work required for special education certification in three years. Their tuition is paid for by the Division for Exceptional Children Services, Kentucky Department of Education. Each year hundreds of individuals are issued a one year provisional certificate in special education. Currently about 200 to 300 new individuals a year are obtaining the one year provisional teaching certificates. This procedure was initiated in the late 70s and continues to exist.

Data are not available from the Kentucky Department of Education to determine what percent of these one year provisionally certified special education teachers complete their special education certification and continue to teach in special education programs. The Kentucky Department of Education does not maintain data regarding the number of fully certified special education teachers who each year seek deletion of special education certification from their records because they do not want to teach special education. The Department is also unable to provide data on the number of special education teachers who are certified in special education but have chosen to leave special education and who are currently teaching in regular education. It estimates this number to be about 6000.

For nearly twenty years the Kentucky Department of Education has been issuing one year provisional teaching certificates in special education to hundreds of individuals and has been giving them monies to complete the certification requirements. But the special education teacher shortage continues. The reason lies in the nearly 6000 who are certified in special education but who are teaching in regular classrooms and the unknown number of those who have had their records deleted. It is the continued high attrition rate which is fostering the long existing special education teacher shortage in the Commonwealth.

Purpose

This study was aimed to (a) identify the reasons for the high attrition of special education teachers in Kentucky, and (b) bring them to the attention of appropriate authorities at all levels including the local education agencies (LEAs), state education agency (SEA), and the institutions of higher education (IHEs) for necessary actions by them.

Procedure

The investigator approached the Kentucky Department of Education to access the data on certified special education teachers who are currently teaching in regular education in Kentucky for the purpose of using them as the subjects of this study. After nearly a year of persistently requesting this data the investigator concluded that it was not going to be accessible. Therefore, the investigator used an alternative procedure to conduct this study.

In the Fall semester of 1995 the investigator personally administered a brief questionnaire (shown in Table 1) to all the

Insert Table 1 about here

part time students enrolled in special education courses required in the M. A. Ed. program. All of them, a total of 98, were full time special education teachers. These respondents represented 27 counties in central and south eastern Kentucky. The number of respondents by the counties is shown in Table 2. Their total

Insert Table 2 about here

teaching experience ranged from 4 to 24 years; experience in the present county varied from 4 to 22 years (represented in Table 3). The respondents represented all teaching levels from

Insert Table 3 about here

elementary to high school as shown in Table 4. A majority of the

Insert Table 4 about here

respondents were teaching in learning and behavior disorders

(LBD) programs. Others were teaching the mildly mentally disabled, functionally mentally disabled, emotional and behavior disorder, communication disorders, and visually impaired students as per Table 5.

Insert Table 5 about here

In addition to providing the demographic information, the respondents were asked to give three reasons in no more than one phrase why in their opinion special education teacher leave special education and choose to teach general (regular) education. The reasons identified by the respondents were listed and tallied. They were ranked by their frequencies. This data is reported inTable 6.

Insert Table 6 about here

Discussion

The most common reason identified for special education teacher attrition is the excessive paper work. It was identified as a reason by 80%, 78 out of the 98, respondents. It is also important to note that those who identified it as a reason always listed it as their first reason.

The additional paper work required of special education teachers primarily consists of maintenance of data concerning the implementation of the goals and objectives on the students' individualized education programs. Another important paper work consists of the data collected and maintained by the special education teachers pertaining to regression and recoupment for those students who may need extended school year program and services.

The inordinate amount of paperwork performed by the special education teachers in the study deals with the Admissions and Release Committee (ARC) and its functions. In Kentucky this is an equivalent of an IEP Committee. The ARC is responsible for receiving referrals, obtaining parents' permission for evaluation, conducting students' assessment, determining students' eligibility, developing students' individualized education programs (IEPs), conducting annual review of the IEPs, assuring compliance with procedural safeguards, etc. According to the provisions of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) this committee is to be chaired by the principal or

his/her designee who has the authority to provide and supervise special education and related services to students. In practice in a majority of school buildings in Kentucky the special education teachers chair the ARC meetings and perform all the paper work required of the ARC chairperson. They schedule the meetings, notify the parents, hold the meetings, write meeting summaries, write the IEPs, secure parents' signatures, etc., etc. When this paper work is added to the normal paper work required of special education teachers it becomes overwhelming.

The Directors of Special Education in each county are aware of the appropriate procedures but they do not exercise any control in school buildings. The special education teachers know the appropriate procedures but they have to comply with the directives of the school principals. Many of the special education teachers get fed up with the situation and quit teaching special education. The remedy lies with the Division for Exceptional Children Services, Kentucky Department of Education. The Division is perhaps aware of the situation but has not taken any steps to address it.

The second most common reason, cited by 42%, 41 of the 98 respondents, is the lack of respect, support, cooperation, acceptance, and understanding by the general (regular) education teachers. The relationship between special and general education teachers apparently is not very healthy. Special education teachers do not perceive that they are respected by their general education colleagues.

Since the implementation of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) there is a push toward collaboration and full inclusion. A majority of the general education teachers reject both. It is their rejection of collaboration and full inclusion which is affecting their relationship with the special education teachers. Also, general education teachers resent the inclusion of special education students in student assessment required under KERA. Their impression is that their schools' scores would be lower on account of the special education students' performance on these tests and the low scores would deprive them of their cash rewards.

The third reason given by 34% of the respondents, 33 of the 98, is the lack of administrative, principals' respect, support, and cooperation. A large majority of the school principals in Kentucky are former coaches. They have not had any course work in special education. The procedural safeguards required under IDEA particularly concerning suspension and expulsion of special

education students are not well received by the school principals. Their displeasure with these procedures is often generalized to special education.

Lack of students' progress, work overload, and lack of parents' interest ranked fourth, fifth, and sixth respectively cited by 18%, 17%, and 14% of the respondents. If the excessive paperwork thrust upon the special education teachers is performed by the ARC chairpersons it would have a significant impact on the work overload. It is also possible that when the special education teachers spend their time more on instruction rather than keeping up with the paper work related to ARC it may improve students' progress. The special education teachers may experience more gratification. They may feel less stressed and less burn-out, the eighth ranking reasons given by 9% of the respondents.

The remaining eight reasons given for special education teacher attrition are cited by one to eight of the 98 respondents. These reasons are there but they do not contribute to the problem in a significant manner.

Conclusions and recommendations

The highest ranking reason which is contributing to special education teacher attrition is the excessive paperwork. Most of the excessive paperwork is related to the ARC. This problem can be addressed by the Division for Exceptional Children Services, Kentucky Department of Education by ensuring that the local education agencies do not assign the responsibilities of ARC chairpersons to special education teachers.

The second highest ranking problem arises out of either inappropriate inclusion of special education students in general education classrooms or premature implementation of collaborative programming. Again, the problem needs to be addressed by the Division for Exceptional Children Services, Kentucky Department of Education. This problem should also be addressed by the institutions of higher education in their teacher preparation programs both in general and special education. Proper collaboration procedures should be incorporated in teacher education curricula and modeled to both groups of the preservice teachers. The latter would also have a bearing on the third highest ranking reason. If the first three ranking items are addressed, the factors driving teachers out of special education and causing their high attrition would be significantly reduced.

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Table 1. Special Education Teacher Attrition Survey Instrument

Many special education teachers request the deletion of special education certification from their record. Then they go on to teach general (regular) education students. My interest is to find out the reasons why these teachers leave special education in favor of general (regular) education. I will appreciate your honest and well thought out responses to the following questions to help me collect the data for my study. I am collecting the data solely for research purposes. I will treat the data confidentially and will maintain anonymity of my respondents. Thank you for your cooperation.

1. In what level school are you teaching? Encircle one of the following:

   Elementary Middle High

2. In what area of special education are you teaching?

   ---LBD ___FMD ___MMD ___EBD ___CD ___Other (Specify)

3. How long have you been teaching in special education? Total number of years_____.

4. In what county are you presently teaching? For how many years?

   County_____ Number of years_____

5. In your opinion why do many special education teachers leave special education and choose to teach general (regular) education? Please give at least three different and clear reasons in no more than one phrase.

   a. _____
   b. _____
   c. _____

Table 2. Number of Respondents by Counties

Anderson	1
Barbourville Ind....	1
Bourbon	3
Boyle	3
Casey	4
Clay	3
Estill	8
Fayette	5
Frankfort Ind.....	1
Garrard	1
Harrison	1
Jackson	6
Jessamine	3
Lee	2
Lincoln	4
Madison	4
McCracken	1
Mercer	3
Monticello Ind.....	1
Perry	3
Powell	12
Pulaski	15
Wayne	7
Webster	1
Wolf	2
Woodford	1
Blank	2
Total	98

Table 3. Numbers of Years Teaching
N = 98

	0-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	20+	Blank
Total # of years	58	13	6	7	1	2
# of years in the present job	63	14	3	6	0	1

Table 4. Respondents' School Types

N = 98

Elementary	Middle	High	Blank
42	27	28	1

Table 5. Respondents' Teaching Areas

N = 98

LBD	MMD	FMD	CD	HI	VI	EBD	Blank
80	4	8	2	0	1	2	1

Table 6. Reasons by Frequencies, Percentages and Rankings
N = 98

	Frequencies & percentage		Ranking
Too much paperwork/paperwork	78,	80	1
Lack of respect, support, cooperation, acceptance, understanding - regular education teachers	41,	42	2
Lack of administrative, principal's, respect, support, cooperation	33,	34	3
Lack of or slow students' progress	18,	18	4
Overload of work, additional (non-special education) responsibilities (committees, sponsorships), longer hours	17,	17	5
Lack of parents' support, respect, cooperation, interest.	14,	14	6
Laws, regulations, rules, procedures change all the time	13,	13	7
Stress related to students' behaviors	13,	13	7
can't discipline students because of regulations	13,	13	7
Having same students, monotony	10,	10	8
Too many regulations, legal requirements, timelines, due process procedures, hassles	9,	9	9
Stress	9,	9	9
Burn-out	9,	9	9
Fear of lawsuits, liability	8,	8	10

Unrealistic KERA (Kentucky Education Reform Act) demands, expectations (collaboration, KIRIS testing)	7,	7	11
Isolation, discrimination,	6,	6	12
Pressure from parents	5,	5	13
Many came to get paychecks, to enter the job market, regular ed. first choice.	4,	4	14
Lack of materials to work with (spend own money)	4,	4	14
Lack of adequate facilities (sharing room with other teacher, size of classroom)	3,	3	15
Desire to have your "own" traditional classroom	3,	3	15
Lack of quality leadership in special ed.	3,	3	15
Lack of regular education teachers' training to deal with mainstreaming or behavior problems	3,	3	15
Inconsistencies of school districts	3,	3	15
No professional satisfaction	3,	3	15
Pressure from co-workers, I am pulled in every direction	3,	3	15
Lack of support from Spec. Ed. Director	2,	2	16
Social stigma	2,	2	16
Not enough support from State Dept. of Education, no answers from Frankfort	2,	2	16
Job treated as insignificant	2,	2	16

Attitude of the central administration	2,	2	16
Inappropriate training (trained in TMH, teaching FMD), inappropriate inservice	2,	2	16
Multiple levels to teach in the resource room	1,	1	17
Inability to get updated information on time	1,	1	17
Pressures from co-workers	1,	1	17
Amount of dirty work, wiping bottoms	1,	1	17
Constant scrutiny of job	1,	1	17
Bureaucratic hypocracy	1,	1	17
Too much work for no additional money	1,	1	17